



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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Former WASA Payroll Specialist Sentenced to Two Years in Prison for Theft

Washington, D.C. - Sonia Renee Coleman, also known as Sonia Renee Dickerson, 39, a former payroll specialist for the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (WASA), has been sentenced to twenty-four months in prison in connection with her theft of \$236,256.17 from the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (WASA), Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips, Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, and Charles J. Willoughby, Inspector General for the District of Columbia announced today.

Coleman, of Oxon Hill, Maryland, was sentenced yesterday in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia before the Honorable Colleen Kollar-Kotelly. In addition to the prison sentence, Judge Kollar-Kotelly placed Coleman on three years of supervised release and ordered her to pay restitution in the total amount of \$230,315.00 to WASA and its insurance carrier.

Coleman pled guilty to one count of interstate transportation of stolen monies on May 4, 2009. As part of her plea, Coleman admitted that from December 2004 through January 29, 2008, she was employed by WASA as a payroll specialist. From May 2006 through January 29, 2008, Ms. Coleman used her access to WASA's payroll processing systems to steal \$236,256.17 from WASA by altering the electronic bi-weekly payroll data for approximately forty WASA personnel who were recently terminated, on sick leave, on leave without pay status, or absent without leave status. Her alterations generated additional hours or benefits and, therefore, additional pay for those WASA personnel. Having manually created additional hours or benefits for the WASA personnel, she also altered the electronic fund transfer (EFT) numbers for the employees' direct deposit information. She changed those EFT numbers to EFT numbers for two accounts that she controlled and an account in the name of one of her friends.

Once the money had been transferred to the unauthorized accounts as directed by Coleman, she made additional alterations to the electronic bi-weekly payroll data on WASA's local servers to delete any electronic record of her alterations. Because her initial alterations had generated paper payroll stubs addressed to each WASA employee, she also intercepted within

WASA the envelopes addressed to the employees and threw them away to conceal the unauthorized payments. WASA learned of the theft from an employee at one of the credit unions at which Coleman had directed the funds. As a result of the detection by the credit union, WASA was able to recover \$30,906.04 from Coleman's accounts, which represented the proceeds from the last four unauthorized transfers.

In announcing the sentence, Acting U.S. Attorney Phillips, FBI Assistant Director in Charge Persichini, and D.C. Inspector General Willoughby praised the investigative efforts of Special Agent Mary Gleason of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Special Agents Teddy Clark and Vantresse McMillan of the District of Columbia Office of the Inspector General. They also recognized the efforts of Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael K. Atkinson, who prosecuted the case.

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